

2012 John Adams and John Quincy Adams
Pro Bono Publico Awards

Susan Corcoran

For many low income women in Massachusetts who survive domestic violence, having a lawyer to turn to is a luxury they could never hope to find. But to those who have reached out to Community Legal Services and Counseling Center, and to Susan Corcoran specifically, survivors of abuse have gained a skilled advocate who understands their plight. Over the past six years, Attorney Corcoran has provided pro bono representation to no less than 70 such women. By assisting these individual clients, and by contributing greatly to the success of the family law unit at CLSACC, Attorney Corcoran has been nothing short of extraordinary.

In addition to her meticulous preparation and understanding of the nuances of complicated family law matters, Attorney Corcoran demonstrates unique gifts in working with survivors of domestic abuse. She has

unflagging patience and empathy. And she has a tremendous ability to connect with, and empower, her clients. In one case, one of her clients had divorced her abusive husband ten years earlier. This client had raised her high school age child alone, and had received her high school diploma, and associate's and bachelor's degrees, all with minimal support from the father. While he now owned a successful business, the client never sought to challenge the original child support order because of previous abuse and threats to kidnap the child. With Attorney Corcoran's help, the woman was able to receive additional child support, including provisions for payment of the child's college tuition. Knowing that the client had been too fearful to attempt to do this on her own, Attorney Corcoran encouraged the client to participate in the preparation of her case. By understanding the importance of empowering the client to take ownership of her own case, the ultimate legal success gave the client the confidence she needed to move forward.

In addition to her extensive pro bono work on individual cases, she has also recruited others to donate their time and energy to CLSACC. Frequently, she enlists specialists to assist with cases, once finding an attorney in the Dominican Republic to litigate a portion of a case that occurred there. She does not merely recruit CLSACC volunteers; she has also created a strong community of CLSACC volunteers. Hosting brown bag lunches, she has given attorneys, many of whom are solo practitioners, the opportunity to discuss developments in family law and to form a community centered on their pro bono work. Attorney Corcoran has singlehandedly transformed the CLSACC volunteer corps into a supportive network of committed lawyers able to advocate on behalf of those most in need.

Attorney Corcoran is recognized as the unofficial assistant director of the family law unit at CLSACC. In fact, when the legal director of the family law unit was taking family medical leave, Attorney Corcoran kept the unit running smoothly - all as a volunteer.

She has drafted and edited agency materials and training manuals, created forms and templates for volunteer use, and organized volunteer and community training sessions.

Susan Corcoran is an exceptional and dedicated pro bono attorney whose individual and organizational pro bono contributions have made the Cambridge area safer for low-income women and their children. For her passionate commitment to pro bono service and her clients, she is a worthy recipient of an Adams Award. We offer her our sincere thanks.